

# Milton Township and the story of the Saratoga County Almshouse in 1900



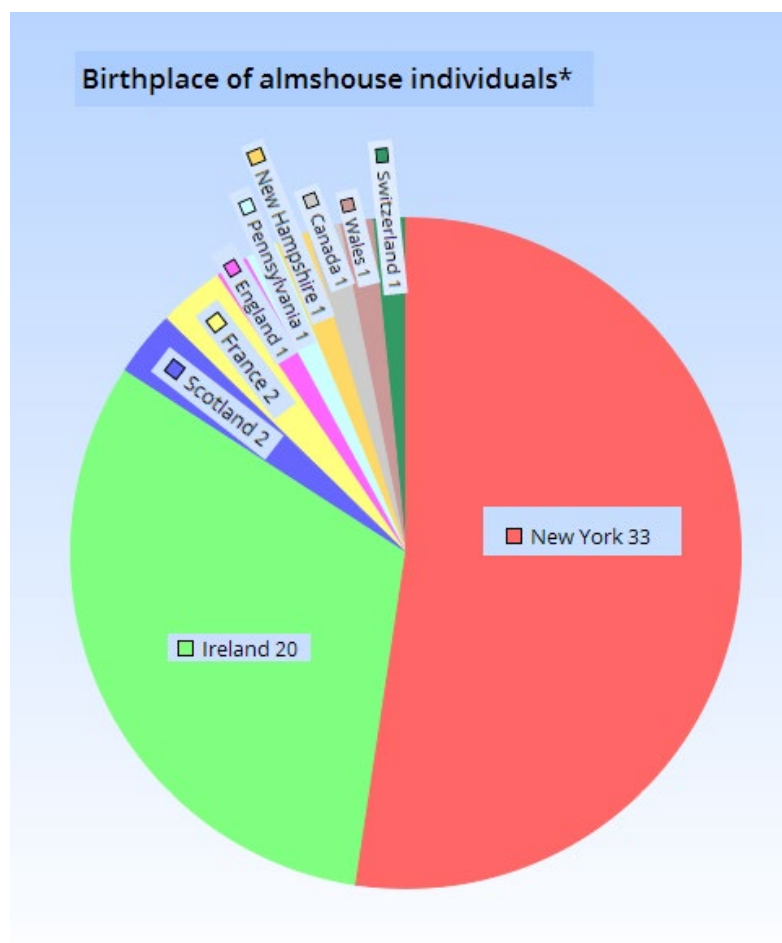
*Saratoga County Alms House served Saratoga's paupers for almost ninety years. Women lived in the east wing, men lived in the west wing, and administration operated in the center. Possibly salvaged from the 1827 Poorhouse, was a two-story frame house. Barns and farm outbuildings were located to the north. The Almshouse was demolished in 1960. Today, on the site, are located both the Saratoga County Jail and Sheriff's Department, along with the Saratoga County Highway Department. Photograph is courtesy of [the Saratoga County Historical Society](#). [Here](#) is a related postcard.*

Recently, as I was updating my mom's family tree, using varied resources on the internet and photographs I have at my disposal, I stumbled across a list of "inmates" in [Milton Township](#), within New York's Saratoga County. These men were part of the "Saratoga County Alms House." The 1900 U.S. Federal Census gives an opening into this history of this facility, telling more of the story.

This census shows 62-year-old married man named [Charles Spaulding](#) as the superintendent of the house, along with his 36-year-old wife Carolina as a matron. He is also living with his daughter Elizabeth (age 22), a dress maker, his son Charles G. (age 16) at school, a 27-year-old named Edward Lapoint as Assistant Superintendent, Florence Morehouse as a 28-year-old cook, Margaret Willis as a 31-year-old housekeeper and her recently born daughter,

Edith M. Most of these individuals, apart from Spaulding, were born in New York, who was born in Vermont.

Then we get to the 70 inmates of this poorhouse/almshouse. Most of them, apart from five Black Men, were White. The majority of those in this facility were also male (46 of them), but a considerable number were female (23 of them). In terms of their age, of those whose age was known, they averaged at 66 years old, if you round down.<sup>1</sup> Of the eight individuals whose year of immigration was known, they generally came in approximately 1851 to the United States. The facility, however, consisted of many foreign-born individuals:



\*only includes those whose birthplace is known.

---

<sup>1</sup> If you round down from 66.35555555555556.

In 1864, this [same almshouse was crowded](#), with “lunatic inmates” with some in restraints, a supply of water but “no bath tub” along with no “ventilation or uniformity of heat in winter” and the house is “old and badly dilapidated” with rooms that are “out of repair, and the air in the sleeping rooms most foul and noisome” but it is “kept in as good order as possible.” This same assessment said that there was no improvement between 1857 and 1864. It is known how much these conditions changed or stayed the same between 1864 and 1900. The place seemed to change, since [one 1907 article titled “Supervisors in Session”](#) declared that the facility is one the best in New York State, saying:

*“the general air of the almshouse is homelike and not institutional, and the institution is managed economically and thoughtfully.”*

Add to this a 1907 report by the State Board of Charities of New York State notes the facility [sits on a 127 acre farm and has a capacity of 150 people](#). This report notes that the facility consists of varied buildings, with recent improvements, steam heating, electric lighting, and adequate ventilation. Butressing this a 1904 note that the facility [was exhibited](#) by the State Board of Charities. Being that the case, it was not “hellish” like it had been in 1864. Other reports [add](#) that there were many persons they considered “feeble-minded or idiotic” (whether they were accurate or not in this assessment is not known) within the facility, but that this is not the majority. This facility was also different than that in 1864 because this almshouse [replaced the one in disrepair](#) in 1876, the same one described as horrible in a paragraph noted above. Other than this, little is known about the almshouse. It clearly occupied a “[central position](#)” in Millston, aiming for the “accommodation of the poor of both towns” with an “agent resident in

the house, who keeps an account of all disbursements which he is to render to the overseers.” A 1910 table of the U.S. Census table of “Paupers in almshouses” [lists 100](#) individuals as within, an increase from 70 in 1900, in the Saratoga County Almshouse. One [photograph](#) of the almshouse in 1903 makes it seem desolate but tidy, if that makes sense:



Courtesy of [Harvard College](#).

Even though little is known, with not many hints on [genealogical websites](#), the [historian's office](#) of Millstone, New York, Ballston Spa Public Library's [collections](#), even a back-and-forth discussion on an Ancestry.com forum gives some clues, but [doesn't provide much](#). There is no doubt that those who were considered “different” like those who were transgender [but seen](#) by medical and enforcement bodies as having “mental issues.” However, if the facilities were

anything like the almshouse in Schenectady County, the keeper of the poor house (in this case the superintendent) provided “[food and clothing for the inmates](#)” and there were weekly examinations of “the management, condition, and usage” of the area by inmates. These facilities were also, [like those in Maryland](#), “primary public institution[s] for the destitute,” lasting for many years. This facility was undoubtedly different than [the Philadelphia Bettering House](#) in which sickened Maryland soldiers spent time during the Revolutionary War. Virginia Commonwealth University succinctly summarizes poorhouses or almshouses, while [relating it to New York in a sense](#):

*In 1824, New York State enacted the County Poorhouse Act, a measure that directed each county to erect one or more poorhouses to care for the “worthy poor.” Expenses for building and maintaining these institutions were to be paid by tax funds levied by the county government. About the time the Civil War ended, a number of state institutions were being erected to care for specific populations deemed unsuitable for being cared for in county poor houses, e.g., the insane, the disabled, children, women.*

That does not mean that the facilities were always in the best interest of these individuals, but they served a societal purpose to those who wanted to keep “different”/“unsuitable” people off the streets. In that way, it pushed away social problems to a place where people couldn’t see them, allowing them to ignore glaring inequities and inequalities in their societies.

While the New York Censuses of Inmates in Almshouses and Poorhouses from 1830-1920 [could contain valuable information](#) about the Saratoga County Almshouse (like [this entry](#)), in this case,

it is better to look at the census itself.<sup>2</sup> This census shows that those in the town were working class. They were lumbermen, sawmill laborers, teamsters, farm laborers, farmers, miller, ice taker, and so on. This article is only dipping one's toe into the sea of research, but it provides a start into this important topic.

© 2017-2023 Burkely Hermann. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>2</sup> Then historian of Saratoga County, Lauren Roberts, even found "[a book of the county's poorhouse records dating back to mid-1800s](#)". The book is kept in a basement vault with other irreplaceable records and lists the names and vital information of hundreds of children who were left at facilities in Saratoga County and surrounding areas because their parents died or were unable to care for them." Sadly, this cannot be used here as it is in the wrong time period, but is worth study in the future. However, one ledger of "[Paupers Admitted to the Poor House](#)" of Saratoga from November 1893 to October 1935 has been given to the county historian of Saratoga County. That could add more information about this facility's inmates.